

The Paper

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Free

Yallourn: Fighting For Power

CARLENE WILSON

"If this company gets away with it - then so can any company in Australia".

By now most Victorians will know that something is going on in the La Trobe Valley. In November last year the lights went out in Melbourne for four hours - the workers at the Yallourn Energy power station had walked off the job - and so had other power workers in the Valley.

It was one more step in a struggle that has been going for nearly two years. A struggle not for higher wages or better conditions, but to retain what the power industry workers already have.

Workers at Yallourn have been offered a new contract, but before the company would begin negotiations they demanded a series of conditions; these have been dubbed the Seven

Deadly Sins. The company wants to be able to change wages, conditions, shifts and even employment status whenever it likes. Naturally enough no one was prepared to accept them.

Since the industrial action of last year - a six week go-slow during which the workers didn't get paid, and then the four hour shutdown - the situation has escalated. The secretary of the union in the Valley and fifteen others have millions of dollars of writs against them and the workers as a whole have been forced into the Arbitration Courts.

But the struggle in the Valley started long before the most recent attacks. Power stations in the La Trobe Valley were privatised under Jeff Kennett. Since privatisation an industry that used to provide 11,000 jobs now provides around 2,500. If Yallourn Energy (now owned by China Light and Power) gets its way that will decrease further.

Small communities in the valley have been shattered, and the community in Moe has been particularly hard hit. Twenty six shops have closed in Moe, along with the brand new hospital and Secondary School. Residents now travel 30kms for hospital care, and students face more than hour-long bus trip to the closest High School.

As one mother in Moe commented: "how are we supposed to keep our young people in the education system in conditions like these?"

One State Government solution is the promise of a high speed train service into Melbourne, but the residents point out they had perfectly good jobs, shops and life in their own community, right up until privatisation.

And this argument keeps coming back to the Government - State and Federal. One local resident made

comment on the current state of the ALP: "Have they forgotten why they are in the Labour Party?"

But people in the Valley have not been taking the attacks lying down. One group of women - the partners of power workers - were involved in organising a meeting with Monica Gould; they have been trying to pressure their elected representatives to offer real support.

They tell of a particular incident with Tim Hallas who stood in a meeting promising help but only hours later was sitting down with the company helping them prepare writs against the workers.

The unemployment, and the pressure on those who still work, is taking its toll. Women in the Valley talk about marriage break-ups, about the young and not so young men who are committing suicide because they see no way out. And they point out that

there are no local mental health professionals to deal with a problem which is now commonplace.

But among the desperation there are stories of hope - neighbours and friends who have pulled together to mow lawns, offer support, bring flowers into the campaign office. Stories of women who have suddenly taken the limelight, spoken at rallies, confronted politicians, been interviewed for television. And stories of incredible solidarity. At least one worker has been offered to have huge writs against him settled. He has refused, arguing that if the company can drop charges against him, then it can against the others as well.

The residents of LaTrobe Valley are intent on restoring life to their community, but this is by no means the only motive behind their steadfast fight. As one local woman put it: "the fellas are doing this for the public interest."

FairWear Despair at National Party Decision

The National Party announced recently their intention to reject the Fair Employment Bill. "Outworker exploitation - \$2 an hour wages are the reality for 140,000 Victorian outworkers," stated Pamela Curr, of FairWear, a coalition of Churches, Community Organizations and Unions that addresses the gross exploitation of workers who make clothing at home.

"Currently Myers, David Jones, Sussan and Woolworths are renegeing on their commitment to the Outworkers Code of Practice. This action in refusing to abide by voluntary requirements illustrates exactly why legislation is necessary. Without legislation the culture of exploitation will continue."

Curr continued, "The National Party know this. How can they sleep at night knowing that they are denying 'a fair go' to the most disadvantaged, exploited and cheated workers in Australia today?"

The fate of the Bill now lies in the hands of the Liberals. Outworker representatives have explained why they need the Bill to Mark Birrell, Victoria's Minister for Industry, Science and Technology..Despite repeated calls, Denis Napthine has declined to discuss the Bill with the Outworkers.

For more information contact Pamela Curr, FairWear Co-ordinator: 0417517075



Some of the 20,000 participants at the World Social Forum, story on page 4

News from around the World

WEF compares itself to the Pentagon Hackers were able to break in to the computer systems of The World Economic Forum and obtain e-mail addresses, passport numbers, even credit card numbers from the big cheees who met at Davos in late January. Charles McLean, the WEF's Director of Communications and Public Affairs, told reporters they were treating the matter as a crime. Just in case the hackers misunderstood who they're dealing with, he added, "If they could have a security breach at the Pentagon and they can

have a security breach at the State Department, it is possible to have a security breach at the World Economic Forum."

The dangers of seeking foreign work The recent discovery of a human organ smuggling ring in the southern city of Bukhara (Uzbekistan, Central Asia) is focusing attention on the dangers of widespread poverty, which is driving many to resort to desperate measures in a search for economic security. Authorities have yet to establish a final death toll, but at least

70 murders have been attributed to the human organ smuggling ring. A Bukhara surgeon and her husband, a professor at a local technological institute, stand accused of the murders. The couple allegedly operated a phantom travel agency that purported to arrange foreign work visas. As Uzbekistan's economy has remained stagnant since the country gained independence in 1991, many citizens have resorted to emigration to Europe or America as the fastest way out of poverty. Many are willing to pay sums of money up front to self-

styled agents, who promise ready-made jobs in the West.

Disappearance of Earth's Ice Cover February 2 (IPS) - A major glacier formation in Antarctica is shrinking, according to a new scientific report that is likely to heighten concerns that global warming is causing the world's ice cover to melt. At a conference in China on January 22nd, a panel of hundreds of scientists from more than 100 countries unanimously approved a report confirming that the evidence for humanity's

influences on the global climate is stronger than ever. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts an average warming of 1.4 to 5.8 degrees Celsius over the coming century. Scientists expect this will cause more frequent and intense storms, droughts and floods. Sea levels are projected to rise by 0.09 to 0.88 metres from 1990 to 2100, according to the report. According to the Worldwatch Institute, an environmental think-tank in

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Workers Occupy Nike Factory

BEN REKO

A labour dispute in the city of Atlixco de Puebla in Southern Mexico has resulted in the occupation of a Nike plant by its workforce. On Tuesday January 9th, 800 workers went on strike at Kukdong International's Mexican plant, taking control of the factory.

Kukdong International, a Korean-owned Nike subsidiary, which also operates plants in Indonesia and Brazil, produces Nike apparel for export to universities in the United States.

The strikers claim many abuses by Kukdong International: forced overtime without pay, extremely low wages, an inconsistent supply of protective clothing, chronic physical and verbal abuse. It is claimed that fourteen to sixteen year olds, who are not legally permitted to work more than six hours a day, have been forced to work up to ten.

Employees further allege that the food in the company canteen is consistently raw, rotten and/or infested with maggots, and that consumption has lead to numerous cases of diarrhoea and several hospitalisations.

Many employees have complained of throat, nose and lung irritation and conjunctivitis.

In response to these conditions the Kukdong workers have formed an autonomous union, the Kukdong Workers Coalition, and demanded that it be recognised by management as the legitimate vehicle for negotiation of wages and conditions at the plant.

The company, however, insists that the workers remain with the management-sanctioned union if they want to keep their jobs.

At least 15 Kukdong workers were hospitalised as the result of a raid by police and company union representatives. The raid was ordered by the Provincial Governor, a member of the Party of Institutional Revolution which is strongly allied with the company union.

The strike began when a handful of workers, including a recent "employee of the month", were fired for leading protests within the plant. The Workers Coalition have asked that Kukdong reinstate all illegally fired workers and agree not to take reprisals against those who have participated in the stoppage or other protests.

Information source:
international@ranknfile-ue.org

New Find in AIDS Research

LACHLAN MUSICMAN

A Melbourne-based medical research team are developing a treatment that could bring relief to all who suffer from the AIDS virus.

Blood is made up of red and white cells. The white cells are our immune system. There are two types of white blood cells, known as "T" and "B" cells. T-cells are the white blood cells that are used by the body to attack cell mediated viruses, whereas B cells are used against infections and bacteria - differentiable by their molecular surface. HIV affects the T-cells, impeding their ability to function. Thus people do not die from AIDS but AIDS-related illnesses: those that cannot be repelled due to HIV affecting the requisite white blood cells.

The thymus is a gland in the chest cavity. By the age of two it is usually about the size of two fists. During puberty it shrinks to about the size of half a pea, although has also been known to completely disappear. The thymus uses stem cells created by bone marrow to make T-cells.

The thymus' role in human development is to create T-cells. Within the immune system exist what are known as memory cells. It is presumed that the thymus shrinks at puberty because by this stage a human is able

to reproduce, and the body should have a nice little back catalogue of dodgy antigens in its memory. While most adult HIV patients have developed memory T-cells from past exposures to illnesses, allowing them to fight future infections even without thymic function, infants and children have not been exposed to most illnesses. Without thymic function they are not able to produce immune response to new antigens to fight opportunistic infections.

It has been found by a Melbourne-based Medical research team that the castration of adult humans can lead to a re-growth of the thymus gland. In its reduced state, the thymus merely keeps T-cell levels at a steady level, but a rejuvenated thymus could create new cells. With the introduction of stem cells genetically modified to be resistant to HIV, the regrown thymus could replenish T-cells, and while the recipient would still have HIV, they would also have a stockpile of healthy T-cells with which to defend themselves from other dangerous viruses.

How could we castrate humans, in this day and age? Well, it happens all the time. Biological castration, the temporary halting of the creation of the sex steroids, can be done with the use of drugs.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA OUTLETS

Melbourne has a number of quality alternative media covering print, television and radio.

In the coming months we will profile some of these outlets. In the meantime, tune in and check them out.

3CR - Community Radio produced from Collingwood. Great current affairs and alternative perspectives. Tune in on 885AM. Tel: 9419 8377

3RRR - Australia's largest independent radio - focusing on music, art and culture. Produced from Fitzroy. Tune in on FM 102.7. Tel: 9419 2066

The programs on the above stations are produced by volunteers. So, if you want to get involved with radio, contact them for more information.

Most community radio stations operate on a non-profit model and their content is not determined by advertisers.

If you live in another city or town, search out your community radio station. If there isn't one, why not investigate ways to start one up!

If you are online, check out the following url for a listing of stations:

www.cbonline.org.au/stations.htm

WTO's Mr Moore visits Downunder

DOMENICA SETTLE

Director General of the World Trade Organisation, Mike Moore, met with representatives of aid, development and green groups in Melbourne on February 1, to discuss concerns about the impacts of world trade. The invited groups included Community Aid Abroad-Oxfam, Greenpeace, World Vision, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid and Friends of the Earth.

"In turns he was bored, funny and outraged," said one attendee. "He constantly claimed that there was nothing that the WTO could do about trade, because it's controlled not by its president but by its



Director General Mike Moore

member nations. But in the next breath he would say the WTO exists to liberalise trade,

and so must take the lead on liberalisation."

The WTO was formed in 1995 to make and enforce free trade agreements, and has the power to impose trade sanctions on member countries caught breaking them. The nature of Australia's involvement in the WTO will be called in to question at a Federal Senate Inquiry scheduled for April 26 and 27. A similar inquiry halted Australian involvement in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998.

"The Australian NGOs told Mike Moore that opposition to the WTO would increase unless the organisation

becomes more transparent, accountable and democratic," said Jim Redden, a spokesperson for those at the Melbourne meeting. "The NGOs [also] insisted that the WTO cannot continue to view trade in isolation from its environmental and social impacts."

Opposition was also raised to the WTO's plans to hold its next meeting in Qatar, a small Middle Eastern nation in the Persian Gulf. The choice could effectively silence protest, given both the inaccessibility of the nation, and its laws, which prohibit freedom of assembly, political protest, and even political parties.

Moore was reportedly outraged

by the criticism, insisting that Qatar was the democratic choice of member nations, and that there would be plenty of hotel rooms reserved for NGOs. The Australian groups were however unwilling to distance themselves from the style of protest Qatar could exclude - the street protests that have occurred from Seattle to India to France to Israel. Opposition to the WTO in Australia is now widespread across both mainstream and radical green and social justice groups, church groups and the far right, while internationally protests have occurred across both the first and third worlds.

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Washington, scientists worldwide are witnessing a dramatic melting at the planet's coldest regions. Lisa Mastny, a researcher at the Institute, says the disappearance of the Earth's ice cover would significantly alter the global climate since ice reflects large amounts of solar energy back into space and helps cool the planet.

Corporations and Human Rights
February 1 - Human Rights Watch called on Motorola Corp. to reassess its promotion and sale of communications equipment to the police in

China. Motorola has actively pursued sales of two-way radios to Chinese authorities, including placing a prominent advertisement in a Chinese police magazine. "The Chinese police have a history of repressive tactics, from the arbitrary arrest of peaceful activists to the beating of Falun Gong demonstrators," said Jan van der Made, Hong Kong-based researcher for Human Rights Watch. "Is this the kind of customer Motorola really wants to have?" Human Rights Watch believes that companies should take human rights issues into consideration when contemplating business relations with

security forces that have engaged in a consistent pattern of rights abuses. It urges that companies develop internal guidelines to assist in determining when sales are appropriate and regularly monitor compliance with the guidelines.

Child sex case shakes Thailand
January 30 (IPS) - On December 22nd, "R", as local newspapers have named a 13 year old girl in the Pathum Thani province near Bangkok, met with four other girls near her school. Their plan was to meet with a "customer" who was waiting at a small hotel. "R" said a

friend told her that she would make 2,000 Baht (\$46.50 US) plus extra money for having sex with a male customer -- whom they identified as Thailand's Deputy Senate Speaker, the 65-year-old Chalerm Promlert. After being pressured by her parents, "R" told them the whole story. The parents of "R" pressed rape charges against the politician, who denies the charges. Sexual contact with minors is a criminal offence in Thailand and sexual intercourse with a minor is statutory rape, punishable by up to 20 years imprisonment. However, the Chalerm case is only one among many. Weak law enforcement has

made sexual abuses against young girls a big problem in Thailand. The attraction of easy money is a reason why schoolgirls as young as "R" choose to join or are lured into the sex trade. While the case is still under police investigation, pressure from the public against such abuse has been increasing. While Chalerm's case continues to make the headlines, Kemporn Wiroonrapun, director of the Foundation for Children Development, says "In the process of our work, we have found some cases of young schoolgirls in prostitution engaged in different parts of the country".

The Paper needs your financial support to keep going. If you enjoyed what you read and feel you can assist, please contact us.
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Welcome to Edition Five

This past fortnight has seen the release of two free daily newspapers in Melbourne. MX and Melbourne Express are respectively produced by News Ltd and Fairfax Holdings Ltd, the two main players in Australia's exclusive media ownership.situation.

Initially I had concerns about two new papers being initiated by the same companies that already monopolise the press in this country. I'm (obviously) not against the idea of free news, and think the initiative is a great idea. However, I wondered: would a free newspaper, handed directly to people in the street each day further narrow people's awareness of, and willingness to seek, alternative sources of news? Would free papers provide an easy quick-fix of news that would prevent the public from looking elsewhere, seeking out alternative opinions, presentations and view points?

However, since seeing these publications my concerns have considerably changed. I doubt whether anyone will feel wholly satisfied or "informed" solely from reading the content of MX or Melbourne Express.

Since much of the coverage we have seen so far could hardly be classified as news, my concerns are now for the amount of trees that will be sacrificed to bring us these daily gossip columns, and wonder how many people feel the publications are worth it. I'm interested to hear some opinions of them. Write to us! (Contact details on page 2).

The Paper could always use help with distribution and may soon resort to printing provocative T-shirts, so if anyone wants to be our 'MX...I mean 'Paper Girl', please, get in contact.

Enjoy Edition Five!

Marni Cordell

CORRECTION:

The following paragraph of 'East Gippsland - In Harmony and Conflict', Edition Four, page 4:

"The defence is being funded and prepeared from Legal Aid; it would appear that the defence is being bankrolled by the logging industry, presumably for PR reasons."

Should have read:

"The defence is being funded by the Logging Industry, not Legal Aid. This is presumably for PR reasons."

Our mistake, Sorry!.

United States Increases Intervention in Colombia

The US crusade in its war against drugs has found a scapegoat to redeem all of its worldwide guilts: Colombian producers of the coca leaf. Now Colombia is in the eye of the storm, and the country's main guerrilla, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) is the target it hopes to hit.

In the US, data is the paradigm of drug consumption: 14 million drug users, 5 million addicts, and more than 50 thousand dead every year by overdose. Yet the US anti-drug policy has not changed at all since the 1973 Nixon administration. The logic has long been to destroy the evil "at its root." And the root, for the US, has always been outside its own borders.

This is why Washington is investing a large part of its anti-drug budget (67%) "to fight" outside its territory, while inside it is content to discourage drug consumption in weak publicity campaigns, or "racially" criminalising drug possession and consumption. Indeed, more than 60% of drug criminals are black. But we hear nothing of the persecution of drug cartels.

THE GUILTY

As in any Hollywood movie, the reality that the US presents about "Plan Colombia"'s implementation is simplistic.

Good, respectable citizens are victims of the evil drug traffickers that corrupt the very foundation of the land-of-the-free with their loads of cocaine, and they must be eliminated by force. Yet the scene is not the US backstreets, but rather the thick, green jungles of the Amazon in the south of Colombia. This is where Rambo-esque heroes descend. Only they can handle this problem and save humanity from such evil.

In this version of the "eternal conquerors", discrimination between those who produce the coca leaf, those who process it, and those who traffic it, matters little. There is no clarification whatsoever about the

FARC, its true target. Environmental damage is not even discussed. All information about the paramilitaries, the Armed Force's extension of the dirty war, in keeping with US strategic plans, is omitted. Those displaced by the application of these plans do not exist. The "heroes" are already promising that it will be a clean, fast, and successful operation.

Just as the Nixon administration did, the Clinton administration believed a solution to drug trafficking lies in



targeting the supply. There is no better evidence of this than the words of his first anti-drug campaigner, Lee Brown: "It is easier to go to the hive than to catch the bees as they fly over the US" Easier, and less traumatic for a society used to ignoring the mess in its own backyard.

THE VICTIMS

The other version of the movie comes from the "eternally conquered," the south, complete with its complex history of plots and motives. This is where an explanation for the rise in the production of the coca leaf is found.

These very victims are those who will really be affected by the conflict incubating over the Amazons. Hundreds of families who live off coca leaf production are likely to experience devastating health consequences from chemical weapons such as EN-4, better known as the Fusarium Oxisporum fungus.

These families carry on their shoulders the weight of an entire history of marginalisation and violence on their own land, because of econom-

south of Colombia will only contribute to forcing these families to emigrate again. And the chain of production and commercialisation of the coca leaf will emigrate with them. These new migrations could take place in Colombia itself, as they have up until now, by clearing more of the Amazons. But they could also take place in neighboring countries, such as Ecuador, Peru, or Brazil. In short, South America is still home to 6.5 million square kilometres that are ripe for growing the coca leaf.

ic structural adjustment programs imposed from the outside. They are Colombians who don't have well-known last names, who bunched their memories up in their backpacks and set off in search of new horizons, leaving their identity anchored to the land that was snatched from them by men who have ambition nailed in their souls. They went to the mountains and opened up the jungle looking for ways to survive. And so, next to their corn, yucca, and plantains, they began to sow the coca leaf.

The famous North American crusade and its biological war in the

Currently only 2,600 square kilometres are in use.

By the application of Plan Colombia and the aforementioned fungus, along with other chemicals, the Colombian and U.S. governments are forcing this important and numerous sector of the Colombian population into a mass exodus, a plan which will likely unleash the cruelest and most unsuspected of wars on the continent.

source: www.indymedia.org

Gene Technology Bill -A Set Back For Farmers

SCOTT KINNEAR

On 4th December 2000 a deal was made between the ALP and the Federal Government to pass the Gene Technology Bill 2000 with a minimum of amendments, and almost none of the recommendations of their own Senate Report that were critical to the protection of organic farming systems.

This deal was despite twelve months of lobbying by the Organic Federation of Australia (OFA) of all political parties. In the lead up to the debate the OFA was lead to believe

that amendments to take account of economic impact would be supported by the ALP. It was only on the day the Senate began debate that the significance of the pull out by the ALP on the economic issues became apparent. The Australian Greens supported the OFA amendments to the Bill to require the regulator to protect Non-GMO production systems including organic.

The OFA's main concern is for farmers planning to produce Non-GMO, (including organic), as there is no protection in this Bill for them should contamination occur through

pollen flow and/or inadequate seed segregation systems. This follows the US model where industry self-regulation has led to massive domestic product recall and export market loss following GMO contamination of corn supplies with Aventis Starlink corn in September 2000.

Under the GT Bill, the Regulator cannot require public notification of General Release GM crop locations so Non-GM farmers can only find out by asking their neighbors, as in the US. The Regulator may not impose any requirement for Identity Preservation Systems (segregation).

This will be left to the market, as in the US.

If a farmer wishes to claim organic status in Australia, produce must have absolutely no detectable level of GMO contamination, consistent with Australian and International Standards.

Advice from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission states that any farmer claiming Non-GMO status must have absolutely no detectable level of GMO present. Under Section 52 of the Trade Practices Act, if there is any

detectable level of GMO contamination then a GMO-free or Non-GMO claim is considered misleading and deceptive conduct.

As the Bill passed imposes no compulsory notification of general release GMO crop locations and no compulsory post-harvest tracking systems for GM crops, it will be difficult to take legal action for loss of Non-GMO market premiums due to contamination.

A Discussion on Identity

BEN CITTADINI

My friend and I have spent many summer evenings in heated debate about Australia and its 'peculiar' cultural predicament. We argue for hours, sparring on parallel trajectories about identity, throwing the odd punch here and there, but never really connecting.

One recent balmy evening we sat on his balcony sipping on cold beer and discussing, among other things, taking a trip down the coast the next day. Below us, a large group of Indians had gathered to have a serious game of cricket in a carpark. As we put our feet up on the railing, the conversation again turned to the question of identity.

I suggested that we should go down and see if we could join their game of cricket. He got excited.

"Yeah, I'd love to walk in there with the Aussie flag and slog it out."

"Hang on," I said. "That's just getting in their faces and there'd be no fun in that."

He gave me a persecuted look and replied, "So when the Croatians and Macedonians start killing each other at local soccer matches, that's not getting in my face?"

"What's that got to do with Indians and cricket?" I demanded.

"Nothing, it's just that people come here from other countries and they don't want to live like we do. They want it to be like it was in their homeland."

I sat back and said, "No wonder this country is divided."

He continued by arguing that division in race and culture in this country is a product of selfish migrants holding on to their homelands. They should embrace the flag that represents the values and traditions of a country that is free and open to everyone.

"Black, white, yellow or green. If they don't like it they should go home."

I suggested to him that the original inhabitants of this country may disagree, and that the flag technically represents the invasion and colonisation of this land by the British Empire.

He dismissed this by admitting that it was true, but that it was in the past and had no bearing on what was happening now.

"Then what is happening now?" I asked.

"My father always told me, 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do', and I agree with him," he replied.

"What we have now is all these people coming to this country and they

don't want to live the way we do. When they take up Australian citizenship they sing the Australian anthem and salute the Australian flag, and that's the way it should be. The flag is a symbol of our history, a sorry history, but our history as a nation nevertheless. The Diggers fought under that flag.

"Sure, the aborigines were here first, so put the aboriginal flag on there too. But keep the union jack, to show that Australia has two histories," he added.

"What's happening now is that our previously stable and free country will descend into a country divided by race, religion and the resulting conflict between them..."

The debate went on into the night, both of us sticking to our arguments, but eventually weariness got the better of us. We left each other as cordially as we had come together, with a loose appointment to take a day trip down the coast the next day.

As I walked home, my mind was whirling. Are we a nation with two histories? Are we a nation with thousands of histories? Maybe we are a nation of 20 million histories, each as integral as the other. Perhaps our flag as a symbol is transparent, a scapegoat for the deeper issues of what we strive for as humans in general. Do

we unite under a symbol of a divided past, or do we unite under the universal desire for a positive future?

The next morning my friend picked me up in his panel van and we hurtled out of the city and down the coast. We sat silently as the suburbs finally gave way to vast expanses of countryside. The conversation from the previous night hung heavily in our silence. When we finally spoke it was in complete agreement - we loved the smell of the ocean and the view along the coast and across the peaks of the mountain ranges was beautiful and inspiring. We finally stopped the car and both of us ran exultantly into the foaming fringes of the ocean.

Later, as we sat on the cliffs overlooking the sea, I was overwhelmed by a sense of history. Not a fragmented or dualistic history, but a timeless, harmonious continuum of this ancient land.

As we drove back towards the city, we were at once jubilant at having been to the beach and sad that we had to leave. I wanted the car trip to last forever and I consoled myself with the thought that it was not from whence we came that we shall be returning, but that maybe it is where we are that we shall always be.

ONLINE MEDIA SITES

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Mutually Obligated...?

The Brotherhood of St Lawrence has calculated that over the last year there were 33,000 letters to the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet that were not answered within 21 days. The Department of Family and Community Services failed to answer 4,000 letters within that time. This means that, if the Prime Minister and Family and Community Services Minister Jocelyn Newman were under the same 'mutual obligation' rules as people on welfare payments, they would owe \$12 million and \$1.8 million respectively.

World Social Forum: Challenging Davos

SAM DE SILVA

From January 25 to 30, the first World Social Forum (WSF) convened in Porto Alegre, Brazil bringing together grassroots activists, international NGOs and social movements in the global struggle against free trade and corporate domination. The WSF was planned to coincide with and provide an active contrast to the annual World Economic Forum (WEF), which attracts the richest and most powerful corporations to the Davos, Switzerland to discuss obstacles and strategies to further increase their profits.

WSF saw 20,000 people converging on Porto Alegre to share ideas about social and economic alternatives.

Naomi Klein, author of the book No Logo, attended the WSF and in a recent article described the real story of the Forum as "cross-border alliances - a globalisation of movements". She writes that a reoccurring message which was expressed at the forum was "less talk more action".

The forum ended with representatives of 144 organisations from around the world signing the "Appeal for Mobilisation", a document which summarises the ideas and proposals adopted by consensus during six days of debate.

Journalist Mario Osava from the Independent Press Service writes the

following about the document:

The document is an exhortation to fight 'the hegemony of finance, the destruction of our cultures, the monopolisation of knowledge and of the mass communications media, the degradation of nature and the destruction of quality of life.'

These negative actions, according to the text, are carried out 'by transnational corporations and anti-democratic policies.'

The text states that international financial transactions must be taxed in order to contain speculation, and that the global trade system must ensure full employment, food security and fair terms of exchange.

Meanwhile, the world's borders must be opened for the free circulation of peoples, instead of just for merchandise and money, as is the current case, agreed the civil society organisations.

Among the demands of rural workers and small farm owners, the document calls for a democratic agrarian reform, and states that land, water and seeds must be put in the hands of the peasants. It also demands a ban on the use of genetically modified organisms and of patents on life forms.

It seems too early to predict whether the Forum will have a longer term impact on the issues which were discussed there, but it certainly appears

to have generated significant interest from all groups involved.

However not all the interest has been positive. Brazil Indymedia reports that there was considerable concern amongst participants over the entrance fee of US\$50 which is extremely high in a country where the average monthly wage is US\$200. The World Economic Forum entrance fee is US\$20,000.

The Federação Anarchista Gaúcha (an anarchist group from the south of Brazil) suggests the WSF risks "walking down that same path of accommodation". The concern is that the Forum will simply attempt to reform the existing structures, becoming a bastion of representative pseudo-democracy rather than initiating campaigns to dismantle the current corporate system and recreate a culture for a real democracy.

Like the World Economic Forum, the WSF is encouraging civil society groups to meet up regionally. Next year, the event will again be held in Porto Alegre, but a new location will be chosen for its third year.

Even though there has been some criticism of the WSF, the event has been successful in bringing together a diversity of groups to discuss a way forward.

Ecuador Crippled by Protests

The Ecuadorian government has declared a state of emergency in response to the wave of protest against economic austerity measures which has crippled the country over the past two weeks. Protesters have blocked roads through the Sierra and to the Amazon region, taken over TV and radio transmission sites, gone on hunger strikes and occupied government buildings. 10,000 indigenous people have marched from the countryside into the capital, Quito, with 6,000 of them now occupying the Salesiana University. According to Accion Ecologica (Friends of the Earth Ecuador), protesters are "surrounded and constantly attacked by the police every time they try to march from the university campus."

The protests began in opposition to several economic measures adopted in December. These included the construction of a new oil pipeline, encouragement of mining, privatisation of the water supply, an increase in taxes and a rise in fuel prices which has led to massive increases in the price of public transport and fuel for cooking. By February 5, the Pachakutik Movement was claiming that the 27 mayorships, five prefectures and 461 parochial councils controlled by the group were now backing the uprising, aiding in roadblocks with heavy machinery and people.

Attempts at dialogue between the indigenous groups behind the protests and the government collapsed on the 2nd, with President Noboa's declaration of a state of national emergency. This authorises



the mobilisation of troops, the carrying out of searches and seizures, and the closing of ports, and removes the right to free association. Ricardo Ulcuango of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador stated that the indigenous people would return to the negotiating table "when the state of emergency is lifted and the repression stops."

More than 200 protesters have been jailed, and approximately 30 have been wounded by gunfire, four seriously, while another four people have been killed in the province of Napo, where some of the worst violence has occurred. Several government troops are believed to have been injured.

Protest groups have since occupied the International Monetary Fund office in the capital, Quito, declaring that "the protests are not over yet".

Sources: oneworld.org, indymedia.org